

Maximillian Robespierre

- Robespierre was born May 6, 1758 in Arras, France; died July 28, 1794 in Paris, France.
- He was the son of a lawyer in Arras. After his mother's death, his father left home, leaving Robespierre to be raised by his grandparents.
- In 1781, Robespierre received a law degree. He quickly made a name for himself, allowing his private practice to provide him with a comfortable income.
- He became a devotee of social philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, intrigued by the idea of a virtuous man who stands alone accompanied only by his conscience.
 - He gained a reputation for defending the poorest of society and earned the nickname "the incorruptible" for his adherence to strict moral values.
- At age 30, Robespierre was elected to the Estates General of the French legislature. He became increasingly popular with the people for his attacks on the French monarchy and his advocacy for democratic reforms. He also opposed the death penalty and slavery.
- Some of his colleagues saw his refusal to compromise and his rigid stand against all authority as extreme and impractical. After a time he left the legislature to push his agenda outside of government.
- In April 1789, Robespierre was elected president of the powerful Jacobin political faction.
- A year later, he participated in writing the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, the foundation of the French constitution.
- When the people of Paris rose up against King Louis XVI in August 1792, Robespierre was elected to head the Paris delegation to the new National Convention.
- In December of that year, he successfully argued for the execution of the king and continued to encourage the crowds to rise up against the aristocracy.
- On July 27, 1793, Maximilien Robespierre was elected to the Committee of Public Safety, formed to oversee the government with virtual dictatorial control.
- Faced with pressures both from the outside and from within, the Revolutionary government instituted the Reign of Terror in September. In the next 11 months, 300,000-suspected enemies of the Revolution were arrested and more than 17,000 were executed, most by guillotine.
 - In all of the bloodshed, Robespierre was able to eliminate many of his political opponents.
- Seemingly intoxicated with the power over life and death, Robespierre called for more purges and executions. By the summer of 1794, many in the Revolutionary government began to question his motives, as outside enemies no longer threatened the country.
 - An awkward coalition of moderates and revolutionaries formed to oppose Robespierre and his followers.
- On July 27, 1794, Robespierre and many of his allies were arrested and taken to prison. He was able to escape with the aid of a sympathetic jailer and hid in the Hôtel de Ville (City Hall) in Paris.
- When he received word that the National Convention had declared him an outlaw, he tried to commit suicide, but succeeded only in wounding his jaw. Shortly after, troops from the National Convention stormed the building and seized and arrested Robespierre and his followers.
 - The next day, he and 21 of his allies were executed at the guillotine.
- After the coup, the Committee of Public Safety lost its credibility and the French Revolution became distinctly less radical. France saw the return of bourgeois values, corruption and further military failure.
- In 1799, a military coup led by Napoleon Bonaparte overthrew the Directory and established him as first consul, with dictatorial powers.
 - In 1804, Napoleon proclaimed himself emperor of France.